



**TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, GREAT LAKES
AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

September 15, 2005

Trash Importation--HB 5176, HB 5177, HB 5178.

While we are heartened to see such strong bipartisan interest in reducing out-of-state trash importation, the Michigan Environmental Council, a statewide coalition of more than 70 environmental and health-based organizations representing approximately 250,000 individuals in Michigan, opposes this package of legislation.

We are opposed to this package because it allows the unnecessary and excessive importation of trash to continue while we wait on a host of political uncertainties. Michigan's residents have made it clear: they don't want to keep the welcome mat out for the garbage of other states or other countries. They don't want our state to be the dumping ground for excessive amounts of other people's garbage: wastes that they haven't created and—other than by living under policies that make this state such a financially appealing place to dump garbage—they have not ask for.

MEC agrees with the bill sponsors, as well as sponsors of other similar legislation, that we can and should increase Michigan's ability to simply block the importation of trash from Canada, as HB 5176 attempts to do. This is an avenue that we are supportive of and we are willing and eager to work with you to achieve that end.

However, those kinds of regulatory tools are not yet available, and may not be for some time. The ability for any state to simply say "no" to Canadian trash is obviously an open question, and looks to remain so for some time to come.

And in the meantime, there are other far simpler factors at work here that this committee can and should address. Perhaps the most important of those is the role of economics in the trash debate.

Michigan remains the cheapest place to dump garbage in the region. That's the clear and simple reason why so much trash is crossing our borders and piling up in our landfills. "Michigan: the cheapest place to dump garbage in the region." That's not the message Michigan residents want to see on the welcome sign to our state.

We need the legislature to take strong, immediate steps to reduce our trash appeal, and unfortunately, HB 5176 does not do that.

Legislation has been introduced that would more effectively and promptly deal with the problem before us by reducing the economic incentives to dump on Michigan. First, it would increase the dumping charge from a paltry 21 cents per ton – the lowest in the region – to \$7.50, on par with neighboring states like Pennsylvania; it would ban new landfills until 2010, to ensure that we are providing for our own needs and not continuing to roll out the welcome mat for garbage as we have done in that past; and it would return money to local communities for important local needs such as fire and police protection and recycling.

If garbage were not garbage, but something desirable for Michigan's economic future and quality of life—if garbage were, say, the next generation of microchips or renewable energy or manufacturing jobs—then we could understand the intense desire to keep import costs below those of our neighboring states and counties.

But garbage is just garbage. Michigan doesn't want more of it; Michigan wants less of it. That's why our residents support recycling initiatives, that's why we have the bottle bill, and that's why people all across the state steadfastly haul their little blue or green tubs to the curb each week.

These bills might eventually allow Michigan to block Canadian trash—if both chambers of Congress pass legislation giving states the authority to block foreign sources of garbage, if it's not immediately challenged, and if it doesn't take us afoul of NAFTA and other trade protections. And those are big "ifs."

Perhaps more importantly, even if that "if" does happen, we would still be the trash destination for other states, whose unwanted garbage we happily hosted to the pungent tune of over 3 million tons last year.

The simple solution, and the opportunity of this legislature, is to level the playing field, applying a simply dumping surcharge that applies universally to all trash. In September 2003 Senate Republican's endorsed a dumping charge in the final report of *The Michigan Beverage Container and Recycling Task Force*. Current dumping charge proposals have been introduced by Democrats in both the state House and the state Senate.

We urge you to put aside this package of "wait and see" legislation, and instead enact reforms responsible to the people of Michigan, to their desire for less garbage instead of more, for fewer landfills instead of extra capacity, to their wish to dismantle the "welcome garbage!" signs posted at Michigan's borders.

Thank you.

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